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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ARA-16 ISO-00 EURE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 NIC-01 OMB-01 DRC-01 /119 W
---------- 010688
P R 021831Z MAY 74
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8796
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION EC BRUSSELS
USMISSION NATO
USCINCEUR
AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

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CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, FR
SUBJECT: FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: ON THE EVE OF
MAY 5 FIRST ROUND
1. SUMMARY. AS CAMPAIGN DRAWS TO A CLOSE, MITTERRAND,
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WITH AROUND 42-44 PERCENT IN LATEST POLLS, APPEARS

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CERTAIN TO LEAD ALL OTHER CANDIDATES IN MAY 5 BALLOTING. IT IS UNLIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT HE CAN GAIN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY NECESSARY TO WIN ON FIRST ROUND.. GISCARD D'ESTAING HAS STEADILY IMPROVED HIS POSITION TO AROUND 31 PERCENT AND IS NOW THE SOLID FAVORITE TO DEFEAT CHABAN DELMAS AND THUS OPPOSE MITTERRAND IN THE MAY L9 RUNOFF. CHABAN, DOWN TO AROUND L7-L8 PERCENT IN POLLS, HAS FAILED TO GET HIS SECOND WIND, AND IT WILL BE A MAJOR UPSET IF HE FINISHES AHEAD OF GISCARD. A HIGH VOTER TURNOUT IS EXPECTED. FRANCE SEEMS IN A MOOD FOR CHAN-GE. RESULTS OF MAY 5 VOTE WILL GIVE FIRST INDICATION OF HOW MUCH AND WHAT KIND OF CHANGE THE COUNTRY IS PREPARED TO ACCEPT. END SUMMARY.

2. GISCARD-MITTERRAND DEBATE. A HIGH POINT IN THE FIRST-ROUND CAMPAIGN WAS THE APRIL 25 RADIO DEBATE BETWEEN GISCARD AND MITTERRAND, WHICH GAVE THE IMPRES-SION OF A PRESIDENTIAL "FINAL". BOTH CANDIDATES SHOWED THAT THEY HAVE THE STATURE TO BE FRANCE'S NEXT PRESIDENT. GISCARD ATTEMPTED TO PAINT MITTERRAND AS THE PRISONER OF THE LEFT'S COMMON PROGRAM WHICH WOULD LEAD FRANCE TO COLLECTIVISM. MITTERRAND HELD GISCARD RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL OF FRANCE'S ECONOMIC AND MONETARY PROBLEMS, ESPECIALLY INFLATION. GISCARD WAS THE MORE AGGRESSIVE, WHILE MITTERRAND WAS MORE RELAXED AND HUMOROUS -- GIVING THE IMPRESSION OF THE STATESMAN ABOVE THE BATTLE. BOTH WERE EFFECTIVE. WHILE THERE WAS NO CLEAR WINNER OF THE DEBATE, THERE WAS A CLEAR LOSER -- WHOSE NAME WAS NEVER MENTIONED, AS IF HE WERE NO LONGER IN COMPETITION -- CHABAN-DELMAS.

3. CHABAN: NO SECOND WIND. PARIS POLITICAL CIRCLES ARE GENUINELY SURPRISED THAT CHABAN'S CAMPAIGN HAS GONE SO BADLY. HE HAS NOT BEEN CONVINCING IN ARGUING THAT ONLY HE CAN SAVE FRANCE FROM THE DANGERS OF A CLASH BETWEEN LEFT AND RIGHT. HIS RITUAL BEATING OF THE GAULLIST DRUM SEEMS INCREASINGLY TO BE FALLING ON DEAF EARS. HIS MOST RECENT APPEARANCES HAVE BEEN MARKED BY SPARSE, UNENTHUSIASTIC CROWDS WHICH HE HAS HAD LITTLE SUCCESS IN REACHING. FOREIGN MINISTER
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JOBERT'S RESTRAINED ENDORSEMENT APRIL 26, LIKE PRIME MINISTER MESSMER'S COOL ANNOUNCEMENT APRIL 21, DID LITTLE TO HELP CHABAN'S CAUSE. (CHABAN HAS SINCE BEEN USING JOBERT'S NAME IN EVERY SPEECH.) CHABAN ALSO MAY HAVE MADE A TACTICAL ERROR IN ARRANGING A TV APPEARANCE APRIL 24 WITH FORMER MINISTER OF CULTURE ANDRE MALRAUX, WHO IS IN POOR HEALTH AND HAS DIFFICULTY SPEAKING. THE PROGRAM APPEALED ONLY TO THE TRADITIONAL GAULLISTS --

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WHOSE SUPPORT CHABAN LARGELY HAS -- AND TURNED OFF THE REST OF THE AUDIENCE.

4. ROYER AS CANDIDATE NEVER ACHIEVED THE DEGREE OF CREDIBILITY AND SUPPORT MANY EXPECTED. HIS PERSONAL APPEARANCES BECAME MORE AND MORE MARKED BY CONSTANT HECKLING -- TO THE POINT WHERE HE FINALLY WAS FORCED TO RESTRICT HIMSELF TO RADIO AND TV APPEARANCES. ONLY DRAWING 3 OR 4 PERCENT IN LATEST POLLS, ROYER WILL HAVE TO DO BETTER ON MAY 5 TO HAVE A MAJOR EFFECT ON THE THREE LEADING CANDIDATES.

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H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 NIC-01 OMB-01 DRC-01 /119 W
---------- 010692
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5. INTERIM PRESIDENT POHER PROMISED A FAIR, OPEN CAMPAIGN. THERE HAVE BEEN FEW ACCUSATIONS OF POLITICAL FRAUD, AND NO FORMAL COMPLAINTS ABOUT SLANTED OR IN-SUFFICIENT COVERAGE BY THE STATE-OWNED RADIO/TV SYSTEM. ONE ATTEMPT AT PUBLISHING A SCURRILOUS ANTI-MITTERRAND
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TRACT WAS STOPPED BEFORE THE PAPER WAS DISTRIBUTED. ONLY ROYER WAS SERIOUSLY BOTHERED BY DEMONSTRATORS DURING PUBLIC APPEARANCES.

6. POLLS HAVE PLAYED A DEFINITE PSYCHOLOGICAL ROLE IN THE CAMPAIGN. ONCE CHABAN BEGAN DROPPING IN THE POLLS; THERE WAS A NOTICEABLE DRIFT OF SUPPORT AWAY FROM HIM. THE TWO LEADING POLLING INSTITUTIONS, IFOP AND SOFRES, GENERALLY BASE THEIR PREDICTIONS ON SAMPLINGS OF 1000 - 2000 PERSONS, AND HAVE A CONSIDERABLE MARGIN OF ERROR OF AT LEAST PLUS OR MINUS THREE PERCENT -- PERHAPS MORE WITH REGARD TO LEFT CANDIDATES. PAST POLLS HAVE BEEN GOOD AT ESTIMATING THE PERCENTAGE OF THE TOP VOTE GETTER ON THE FIRST ROUND, BUT HAVE BEEN LESS ACCURATE IN MEASURING ACCURATELY THE MARGIN SEPARATING LOWER RANKING CANDIDATES. IT IS WORTH NOTING, HOWEVER, THAT IN THE PAST FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF 1965 AND 1969, THE ORDER OF FINISH OF THE MAJOR CANDIDATES ON THE FIRST ROUND CONFORMED TO THAT PREDICTED BY THE POLLS. IT WILL BE A MAJOR SURPRISE IF MAY 5 PROVES AN EXCEPTION.
IRWIN

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